

Migraine Headaches

Causes

Migraine headaches seem to be caused in part by changes in the level of a body chemical called serotonin. When serotonin levels are high, blood vessels constrict, or shrink. When serotonin levels fall, the blood vessels dilate, or swell. This swelling can cause pain or other problems. Many things can affect the level of serotonin in your body, including your level of blood sugar, changes in your estrogen levels, if you're a woman, and certain foods.

Symptoms

- Intense throbbing or dull aching pain on one or both sides of your head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Blurred vision or blind spots
- Being bothered by light, noise and odors
- Feeling tired, confusion or annoyed
- Stuffy nose
- Feeling cold or sweaty
- Stiff neck or tender scalp

Symptoms can last between 4 –72 hours and can sometime be preceded by an aura (a feeling or sensation that precedes the onset of a migraine).

Common Migraine Triggers

- Stress (either during a stressful time or right after stress subsides)
- Strong odors, bright lights or loud noises
- Missing meals or fasting
- Changes in sleep. Either getting too much or too little
- Weather changes or altitude change
- Menstrual periods for some women
- Excessive caffeine or caffeine withdrawal
- Smoking or 2nd Hand smoke

Other Migraine Triggers

- Strong emotions, such as depression or anxiety
- Alcohol, such as red wine and port
- Aspartame, found in diet sodas, light yogurts, and other sugar-free foods.
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG), found often in Chinese food and as a seasoning for meats and other foods
- Nitrates, found in cured meats such as hot dogs, bacon, or cold cuts
- Tyramines, found in pickled or marinated foods, aged cheese or yeast
- Birth control pills and hormone therapy

Treatment

Some migraine treatments are used to try to stop the headache as it's beginning. Most of these treatments should be started as soon as you think you're getting a migraine. Another approach to migraine treatment is to prevent attacks with daily medicine. Your doctor may suggest this approach if your headaches happen more than twice a month or if your headaches make it hard for you to work and function. There are many different medicines available.

Self Care & Prevention

- Lie down in a dark, quiet room
- Put a cold compress or cloth over your forehead
- Massage your scalp using a lot of pressure
- Put pressure on your temples
- Avoid foods or other things that seem to cause migraines for you
- Relaxation techniques

Santa Barbara City College
Student Health Services
721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
SS-170 ♦ 956-0581 ext. 2298
www.sbccc.edu/healthservices